

Case Study – Making it Work and Hampshire Travellers Education Service

Craft in our Culture

A project run by Making it Work and Hampshire Travellers Education Service with ten Primary Schools in Hampshire

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Making it Work, an initiative funded to make the case for support for craft in education was seeking a partner with whom to create a project looking at the role of craft as a vehicle to explore cultural diversity. Having received an expression of interest from Hampshire Traveller Education Service, and funding from Arts Council England, Craft in our Culture was designed, delivered and evaluated over the period of one academic year.

What did we try to achieve?

We tried to work to a clear mutual agenda to raise a positive awareness of similarities and differences of Gypsy Roma Traveller culture through craft within the context of the art, craft and design in primary schools. We wished to involve teachers and Traveller and non-Traveller parents and children. An invitation was sent out to all the primary schools in Hampshire. Ten schools came forward to join the project. We hoped to provide a model of good practice that could be used by similar partnerships and by primary schools nationally.

How did we organise learning?

We organised learning to inform and empower Head Teachers to cascade to the staff within their own schools. Our first challenge was to provide inspiration and resources for the Head Teachers, this was achieved through a 'Seed Day' when all the Heads gathered together and participated in practical workshops, listened to presentations, and discussed the issues and challenges around diversity and inclusivity within the context of Travellers. After the 'Seed Day' each Head Teacher went back to school with an action plan to raise a positive awareness of Gypsy Roma Traveller culture through craft. Six months later, the Head Teachers joined together again to share and celebrate their achievements.

How did we know if we achieved our aims?

Each of the ten Head Teachers approached the project in a different way, reflecting the needs of their own schools and communities. This assured us that individuality and flexibility provided a useful route to achieving collective aims amongst a range of schools. Three schools provide a snapshot of outcomes.

School A is situated in a small affluent village in Hampshire. The school welcomes occasional Traveller children from an unofficial site near the school. Non-Traveller parents frequently confront the Head Teacher when Traveller children arrive on site saying.

'What are you going to do to stop the Gypsies?'

The Head Teacher was concerned that negative attitudes within the school stem from the concerns of Non-Traveller parents. He wished to be more prepared whether he had Traveller children in the school or not.

'I want Non –Traveller parents to understand that Traveller parents want the same things for their children. The Travellers suffer prejudice in the village, they are blocked out. My staff get frustrated when the Traveller children leave, but they have left tolerance and awareness behind them. We learn this from them.'

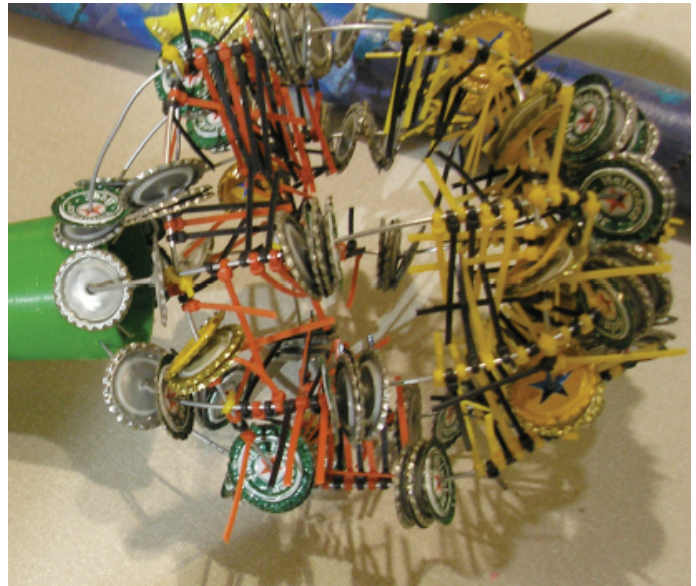
The Head Teacher provided resources for the school library and a dedicated training day for his staff, to include teachers, office staff and the dinner ladies. Using Traveller craft forms as a starting point, (carving, scrolling and basket making) he encouraged the teachers to be pro active in looking for planned opportunities within the curriculum. And he encouraged all the staff to work towards a shared policy of inclusion.

'Craft is a positive vehicle because the pupils will be doing something, not just watching. Craft is very democratic; therefore we can be less inhibited.'

'I want a flexible, inclusive curriculum, this takes time. A measure of success for me will be Non-Traveller children and parents seeing travelling as a valid way of life.'

School B is in a suburb of Southampton. The Head Teacher was aware of Traveller children in the school coming from static homes on the near-by Council estate. Her concerns were focussed upon supporting a young Traveller boy with learning difficulties and behaviour issues, and supporting her staff to gain a greater awareness of Traveller culture in order to counter negative attitudes in the school generated by Non-Traveller parents and playground staff.

'At my previous school there were nomadic Travellers, here there are settled Travellers, it's different. I need to break down preconceptions, the 'lock up your gnome's mentality.'



A toddlers rattle made from wire and bottle tops

'Don't just assume they are exactly the same, but they live in a caravan. Nor that they cease to be Travellers because they live in a house.'

The Head Teacher ran several twilight sessions for playground staff and Non-Traveller parents using Traveller craft forms (bridal accessories and basket making) to raise a more positive profile of Travellers within the school community.

'Pupil awareness will follow on from staff awareness, most of the trouble happens in the playground and the street. We don't learn in a void, craft will make sense of what we learn about culture.'

School C is in Southampton. The Head Teacher wanted to cement a positive relationship with the Traveller communities from a permanent site. He focussed upon developing resources around Traveller craft and culture for the Traveller parents and children to revisit and get back in touch with their own cultural identity. He also wanted to encourage the value of reading, writing and formal education within Traveller families in the community.

The Head Teacher developed Story Sacks (a hand decorated bag containing books and related materials) that responded to Traveller culture. The Traveller families were introduced to the Story Sacks, which are available for all families in the school to borrow. Several Traveller families are now creating their own Story Sacks to 'give back' to the school, and the Head Teacher is seeking funding to run an oral history project with the Traveller families.

'The families began to value their own craft and culture, and to re-examine their negative feelings about school.'